

BROOKE HOLMES : **Let Go of Laqueur: Towards New Histories of the Sexed Body.**

Once upon a time, the body had no sex. This is the story that has long been told about the history of the sexed body in “the West” under the influence of Thomas Laqueur’s book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, published in 1990. It has continued to be told across disciplines, despite incisive critiques of Laqueur’s use of evidence and historical analysis, most recently in Helen King’s *The One-Sex Body on Trial* (2013). We need to let go of this story once and for all.

This article again marshals the historical evidence against Laqueur’s story alongside a critique of that story’s historiographical tropes, a critique indebted to two decades of work in queer theory and the history of sexuality on logics of alterity and affinity in narratives about the premodern past. Laqueur’s account, it is argued, relies on the mutually reinforcing support of two binaries: sex vs. gender and modern vs. premodern. By interrogating each of these binaries, the article proposes new directions in the history of the sexed body within the many traditions of knowledge and practice in dialogue with learned Greek medical texts. It is first shown that, freed from a later twentieth-century opposition of sex and gender, the evidence from the ancient Greek medical and philosophical tradition yields views of the sexed body that often bring together a commitment to sexual difference as physically embodied with a commitment to therapeutic and normative techniques of gender designed to correct for the waywardness of matter. These views, moreover, are many and diverse. The second half of the essay aims to disrupt the monolithic categories of “premodern” and “modern” by emphasizing the diasporic and non-linear nature of the reception of Greek medical texts and the complications of what Ahmed Ragab evocatively calls the “sexscape” that they produce; the importance of situating accounts of “the Greeks” within the dynamics of various historical moments, especially in the early modern period, so pivotal for Laqueur’s story; and the persistent influence of a Foucault-influenced narrative of the premodern past’s radical alterity on the history of the sexed body. The article argues for reading the complexity of the premodern past together with the complexity of our relation to that past.

**Mots-clés :**

sexed body – sexual difference – gender – learned Greek medicine – history of medicine – history of the body – reception of antiquity – Thomas Laqueur – queer historiography – temporality studies – embodiment – non-binary categories